

W. Post 4/26/90

The Options Now

Future Course of the Confrontation Is More Complicated and Dangerous

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The spectacular failure of President Carter's high risk effort to solve the Iran hostage crisis quickly has made it more difficult than ever to solve it in the longer run.

Carter administration officials insisted yesterday that all the previous options of pressure and persuasion remain open to the United States and its allies. But there was no hiding the fact that the abortive rescue operation made every other option more difficult and the future course of the confrontation even more dangerous for all concerned.

Carter expressed hope in his televised address, in sections which are reported to have been the product of his own pen, for "a prompt resolution of the crisis . . . through peaceful and diplomatic means." The president declared that a negotiated solution "has been and will be preferable."

Administration officials dealing with foreign policy displayed no optimism about early results from such a peaceful course, however.

A senior State Department official described U.S. policy in recent days as running on two tracks—a secret military track "which promised a quick resolution," and the openly acknowledged track of mounting international pressures on Iran "which unhappily promised a resolution over a longer time." The official added that the United States, "having abandoned the [first] one, now has to turn back to the other."

A return to negotiations and pressures for negotiations, under the present circumstances, is more difficult than before Thursday's raid.

Five leading academic specialists on Iran told high State Department officials earlier this week that any U.S. military action would be "counterproductive" in terms of release of the hostages, and would strengthen the Iranian sense of having a just cause in the face of American attempts at domination, according to a participant in the meeting.

"To have an outside enemy coming across their borders will be to cause greater resistance" and thus make a negotiated solution more difficult, said Prof. William Beeman of Brown

University. He and four other Iran specialists were meeting with Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance Thursday afternoon while, unknown to them, the secret U.S. military mission was on the ground in the Iranian desert.

The specialists spoke to Vance and other high officials, according to Beeman, of two possible ways for the United States to advance negotiations for the hostage release—formal recognition of Iran's grievances against the United States (along with U.S. grievances against Iran), and expression by Carter of a policy of nonaggression toward Iran, including disavowal of any attempt to restore the shah. Such policies now seem even less likely to be adopted in Washington and less likely to be accepted at face value in Tehran than when they were proposed Thursday afternoon.

The administration, now forced to pin its hopes for a solution primarily on a step-by-step combination of diplomacy and sanctions, put its first emphasis yesterday on repairing any damage that the aborted rescue mission might have done to relations with America's principal allies.

In the early hours of the morning, almost immediately after news of the incident was made public, Vance personally supervised the dispatch of telegrams to all the major allies, explaining in detail the purpose and rationale of the rescue attempt.

Later yesterday morning, administration sources said, Carter attempted to talk by phone with the three leading West European leaders. The sources said he definitely spoke with West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, but were unable to confirm whether he actually made contact with British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing.

In midafternoon, ambassadors or senior embassy representatives of 18 countries—America's 14 partners in

the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, plus Japan, Australia, New Zealand and Spain—were summoned to an hour-long meeting at the State Department with Deputy Secretary of State Warren M. Christopher.

A senior administration official said later that Christopher sought to reassure the allies that the rescue attempt, which the official described as "an antiterrorist mission with humanitarian consideration," did not mean the United States is going back on its promises not to take military action against Iran without consulting its friends.

Many of the allies are greatly concerned that some of the military options weighed by the Carter administration, such as a naval blockade of Iran, could cause serious turmoil in the Persian Gulf region and even lead to a confrontation with the Soviet Union. These fears were referred to obliquely by Defense Secretary Harold Brown, who told a news conference yesterday:

"We have considered, as you know, such things as interrupting commerce militarily. There are obvious complications with that. It internationalizes the conflict, widens it, and might not have the desired effect. The crisis has been heightening tensions in what is already a volatile and vital region."

The senior official, while maintaining that "the president has retained all his options" including possible military moves, added that "it is fair to say" that a renewed emphasis on concerted allied action is now crucial to U.S. planning.

Christopher, the official said, emphasized that point in his session with the ambassadors. According to the official, Christopher called for the allies to continue moving toward "strong and collective economic and political sanctions," to explore every avenue that might allow them to act as middlemen between Washington and Tehran and to intercede, wherever possible, with Iranian authorities to improve the conditions under which the hostages are being held.

Earlier yesterday, as this fence-mending operation was being launched, U.S. officials seemed openly worried that the allies might feel they had been misled and pull back from commitments, such as that made by the nine members of the European Economic Community earlier this week, to impose sanctions against Iran.

As the day wore on, however, officials here became much more reassured about the allied reaction. They said the comments made in the meet-

ing with Christopher were uniformly supportive of the United States, and that was borne out by the public statements of some of the attending diplomats after the meeting.

West German Ambassador Peter Hermès said the rescue attempt would not change his government's commitment to apply sanctions, and added: "We've expressed our deep regret over the failure of the mission."

Canadian Ambassador Peter M. Towe, while noting that those present at the meeting were not in a position "to make pronouncements on the American action," said:

"Those who expressed themselves expressed regret that the effort was not successful. Clearly, had the effort been successful, much tension would have been relieved in a very troubled part of the world."

Although U.S. officials clearly were encouraged by such public remarks, they said it still was too early to tell whether allied governments might be privately angry or might be influenced away from close support of the United States by adverse public reactions within their respective countries to the U.S. action.

The officials said the best sign of whether the rescue incident has hurt relations with the allies probably will become evident this weekend when government heads from the EEC countries gather for a meeting in Luxembourg. As of last night, though, the hope in administration circles was that, while some grumbling about the U.S. failure might be heard, the allies will not waver significantly in their support.